

defined my Presidency, and that day changed the course of history. And while we cannot know the path ahead, we can be confident in the destination: a world where the American people are safe and children around the world grow up with hope and peace.

We can be confident because freedom is universal. I strongly believe there's an Almighty, and a gift of that Almighty to every man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth is freedom. We can be confident because we're blessed with men and women who willingly put the welfare of their nation before themselves. As long as we have defenders of such character and courage, our Nation will always be in good hands, and the future will always be bright.

So I thank you for inviting me today. I thank you for having given me the honor of a lifetime to serve as your Commander in Chief. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:58 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Robert M. Williams, USA, commandant, U.S. Army War College, who introduced the President; and Command Sgt. Maj. Jose M. Powell, USA, U.S. Army War College; Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, USA (Ret.), former commander, and Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former commander, U.S. Central Command; Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### **Remarks at a Reception Honoring the United States-Afghan Women's Council**

*December 18, 2008*

Well, thank you for inviting me. [*Laughter*] A couple of things: One, Jack, thanks very much for lending the prestige of Georgetown to advance a noble cause that I agree is in our Nation's national security interests and our moral interests, and that is the empowerment of women in Afghanistan.

Ambassador, thank you for coming; thank you for working with our Government.

And I'm so proud of Laura. She could have come in and said, "Oh, why did you drag me into this?" [*Laughter*] But instead chose to use her position to take on some important causes. And the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan or freedom in Burma are noble causes that are essential to the peace of the world. And so I thank you for your leadership on this.

I just came back from Afghanistan, Ambassador, and I told the people there that the United States will not forget them; that it's essential that the people in Afghanistan realize that even though the Presidents have changed, our commitment to Afghanistan remains very strong at the governmental level, as well as in the private sector. And I am confident that the Afghan Women's Council sends that same signal that you can take a risk for peace and freedom; that your courage won't be really isolated in the face of thugs who can't stand the idea of women having freedom.

And so I take great heart in knowing that the Afghan Women's Council will survive beyond our time. Having said that, I can assure you that Laura is going to be involved, and so will I if she lets me. [*Laughter*]

Anyway, I'm off to give a little talk here, but I did want to come by and thank you all very much. I thank you for representing the best of America, and I thank you for recognizing that sometimes hard things require a lot of effort. It is really hard to go from tyranny to freedom. But it's going to happen. It is inevitable, because freedom is universal.

And so I'm glad to come by, and thanks for letting me butt in.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. in the Yellow Oval Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John J. "Jack" DeGioia, president, Georgetown University; and Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S. Said Tayeb Jawad. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included remarks by the First Lady, Ambassador Jawad, and Mr. DeGioia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**Remarks to the American Enterprise Institute and a Question-and-Answer Session**

*December 18, 2008*

**Christopher DeMuth.** Mr. President, what's on your mind this morning?

**The President.** First, thanking you for being the leader that you've been, and thanking AEI for generating good thought. People in the public arena need to have support for philosophy, and that's what you provide. So I appreciate all your hard work.

I thought I'd share some thoughts about the Presidency; you could call it "reflections on a—by a guy who's headed out of town." [Laughter] And then I'd be glad to answer questions—and foreign policy, if you want to.

First, I have found that—and by the way, every President is going to conduct their own way of doing business there in the White House. So mine is just mine. I have found that in order to have good decisionmaking and a White House that functions well, that the President needs to articulate a set of principles from which he will not defer. In other words, a set of principles that are inviolate, such as the universality of freedom. That's part of my foreign policy. A cornerstone of my foreign policy is my firm belief that freedom is universal. And freedom applies to Methodists and Muslims, men and women.

I've just come from an Afghan Women's Council that Laura was hosting. I believe that Afghan women have a right to be free just like women in America have a right to be free.

I believe in the collective wisdom of the American people. In other words, I believe we ought to trust individuals to be making decisions for their families. And it's always a tension between government—who can spend the money better, government or the individual? And that's been the basis of my tax-cut policy.

The tax cuts, of course, have been, you know, obscured—the benefits of the tax cuts have been obscured by the recent economic crisis, no question about it. But when they finally take a look back at whether or not tax cuts were effective or not, it's hard to argue against 52 uninterrupted months of job growth as a result of tax policy. And so my

hope is, is that after this crisis passes—and it will—that people continue to write about and articulate a public policy of low taxes.

My health care policy also was all aimed at empowering individuals to make decisions for themselves and an attempt to establish a marketplace for individual policy by changing the Tax Code or health savings accounts.

I've been a firm believer in markets. That may sound contradictory to some of the policies that I have been making recently, which I'd be glad to discuss with you. [Laughter] But I strongly believe in the principle that markets really do represent the—a free society. I mean, after all, people produce goods and services based upon the demand of the individual.

I can remember going to China when my dad was the envoy there, and everybody had the same clothes on. It was like there was no demand. And then having gone back at the Olympics and saw a society in which the marketplace is beginning to function, it's just a vastly different society. And I happen to believe it's a society that—societies based upon the marketplace will be not only more free but more hopeful.

I have found that a President should take on tough problems. The temptation in politics sometimes is just kick them down the road; like, it's too hard to do, so let's just let somebody else do it. One such problem was immigration reform. And in this case I chose to put the spotlight directly on the issue by giving an Oval Office address. Obviously, we weren't successful about getting comprehensive immigration reform. Nevertheless, I feel good about having tried.

Part of the Presidency is the willingness to say, no matter how tough the issue may look, if it requires solution, go after it. And we did. And I do believe there will be a blueprint for a way forward. In other words, we must change the system. It's not working. Obviously, there needs to be more border enforcement—and we're doing that—but people need to be treated with dignity, and there needs to be a way forward for people who are lawful citizens. And there needs to be a temporary-worker program, for example, so that our employers who are relying upon people who are doing jobs Americans weren't doing aren't criminalized.